




Ryan Palmieri's move from running back to quarterback has Pine-Richland rolling



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This is a story about maneuvers, when a back flip leads to a turnaround.

Pine-Richland had just lost for the third time in four games, a sputtering offense had failed to score a touchdown for the second game, and the starting quarterback was injured. So after a 13-3 loss to Seneca Valley Sept. 16, Pine-Richland coach Jon LeDonne informed his team about a likely change.

“I maybe hinted that Ryan Palmieri was going to be at quarterback,” LeDonne said.

Palmieri did the backflip, going from running back to quarterback. Pine-Richland has been all the better for it.

Since the change, Pine-Richland has won three in a row and is now 4-3 in WPIAL Class 5A. Included in the three-game winning streak are two wins against Class 6A teams — North Allegheny and Central Catholic. North Allegheny is [the Post-Gazette's No. 1-ranked WPIAL 6A team](#), and its only loss is to Pine-Richland.

Palmieri has been instrumental in the Rams' turnaround. Against North Allegheny, he ran for 202 yards and two touchdowns, and he completed 7 of 11 passes for 75 yards and two touchdowns. On Friday, against Central Catholic, he completed 8 of 11 for 130 yards and also ran for two touchdowns.

"He gives you that run-pass option a little more," LeDonne said of Palmieri. "He's a real field general. He takes control and knows what he's doing. But our offensive line has really come together the last several weeks, too. The first three or four games, we never had the same line assembled. These last two or three weeks, there's been consistency."

Palmieri — a 5-foot-11, 180-pound senior — wasn't a stranger to going from running back to quarterback. A year ago, starting quarterback Cole Boyd suffered a season-ending ankle injury in the seventh game of the season, and Palmieri again did the backflip. Palmieri ended up completing 78 of 129 passes for 1,066 yards and finished with 478 yards rushing.

Kanan Huffman, who was Pine-Richland's starting QB the first few weeks this season, is due to come back from injury this week. But that doesn't mean Palmieri won't still be at QB.

"They'll both be getting reps in practice," LeDonne said. "We'll go from week to week with what we're trying to accomplish."

Pine-Richland was ranked No. 3 in WPIAL Class 5A at the start of the season but dropped out of the top five after a 42-0 loss to Pickerington North (Ohio). Pine-Richland is back in the rankings this week at No. 5.

"I think we have a lot more confidence now and a little bit of swag," LeDonne said. "I think we're starting to take on the personality of the coaching staff as well. It's just been grit and a hard-work mentality."

More turnarounds

Pine-Richland isn't the only team that has righted the ship after a shaky start.

Seneca Valley was ranked No. 2 in WPIAL Class 6A in the preseason, but many had questions about the Raiders after a 1-2 start. They have since won four in a row and given up only 28 points in those four games.

North Hills started 0-4 and scored 34 points. But the Indians have won three in a row and are 3-1 in the Class 5A Northeast Conference. They have only one conference game remaining: the regular-season finale against

Pine-Richland (Oct. 28). There's a chance that game could end up deciding the No. 1 seed in the conference.

Deer Lakes started the season 1-3 but has won three in a row and is tied for first place in the Class 3A Allegheny 6. The Lancers have a big game Friday against East Allegheny.

Breaking Derrick Henry's record

A running back from Western Pennsylvania continues to put up prolific running statistics and broke a national record Friday that was previously held by NFL star Derrick Henry.

Ethen Knox is a 6-foot-1, 190-pound junior at Oil City in District 10. He is the leading rusher in the country and had 403 yards on 52 carries in a 38-21 victory against Hollidaysburg. It was the fifth time this season that Knox rushed for 400 yards, breaking the record for most 400-yard games in a season, set in 2012 by Henry at Yulee High in Florida.

Oil City, a Class 3A team, is 5-2 on the season, and Knox has rushed for 2,507 yards. Those are surreal statistics. Not to knock Knox's output, but he certainly gets a lot of chances to gain yardage: He averages 35 carries a game.

By the way, Oil City did play a WPIAL team in the PIAA playoffs only two years ago. Oil City played Thomas Jefferson in the PIAA Class 4A semifinals, and Thomas Jefferson won, 62-0.

Moving up

Armstrong quarterback Cadin Olsen and Mapletown running back Landan Stevenson both hit career milestones Friday and continued to move up the WPIAL's all-time lists for passing and rushing.

Olsen, a senior, threw for 242 yards in a victory against Indiana to reach 6,000 career passing yards. Olsen is now 13th on the WPIAL all-time list with 6,232 yards. Only 10 QBs in WPIAL history have thrown for 7,000 yards.

Stevenson rushed for 314 yards against Jefferson-Morgan and surpassed 5,000 for his career. Stevenson, a senior, is now 20th on the WPIAL list with 5,084 yards on 694 attempts. He also has 84 career touchdowns.

Quips get defensive

Aliquippa has scored more than 50 points in its past two games, but the defensive statistics for the season might be the most impressive thing about the Quips.

In high school statistics, yardage lost in sacks is taken away from rushing yards. Counting sacks, Aliquippa has allowed only 99 rushing yards — for the season! The Quips have given up only 441 yards passing, which amounts to only 90 yards a game in total offense allowed.

The Quips have 28 sacks in six games. Neco Eberhardt leads with six, while Naquan Crowder, Jason McBride and Jayace Williams have five each.

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